Presentation to: The Royal Society of Canada Expert Panel: The Status and Future of Canada's Libraries and Archives

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1. **What is the nature and make-up of your organization?**

Southern Ontario Library Service (SOLS) was established in 1989 and is mandated to deliver programs and services on behalf of the Ontario Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport by:

- Increasing cooperation and coordination among public library boards and other information providers in order to promote the provision of library service to the public; and
- Assisting public library boards by providing them with services and programs that reflect their needs, including consultation, training and development.

Mission: The people of Ontario, as represented by the Minister with jurisdiction for public libraries, will have equitable access to library services at a sustainable cost.

1. Libraries will have equitable access to worldwide library collections and e-resources
2. Libraries will provide services according to minimum standards.
    a. Libraries will have a mechanism for collaboration on the development and achievement of common standards.
3. Libraries will have well-informed and skilled staff.

SOLS grew out of an amalgamation of regional library systems that themselves had provided support and development services to the libraries in their regions for decades. SOLS now serves the public libraries of almost 200 municipalities from Windsor to the Quebec border and north to Muskoka and ranging in population from hundreds to hundreds of thousands. Many of our services are provided collaboratively with OLS-North. Some of our services are provided province-wide.

2. **Does your organization provide services: (a) directly to Users? Or, (b) to members who make-up the organization?**

SOLS provides services directly to public libraries across Ontario although some of these are provided directly to Users, for example the OverDrive provincial shared e-collection, online databases, and Interlibrary Loan. However we are not a membership organization but rather an arm's length provincially funded organization serving public libraries.

3. **In terms of Question 2, describe the services provided directly to Users, and if they are consortial in nature please describe the mechanisms in place to define, refine and measure the impact of the services, particularly as they relate to Canadians.**

Services that are provided directly to users are made possible via our libraries participation in either provincially funded license agreements or province wide opt-in agreements. For example:

- Through a special grant, $1.8M for three years, from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, all Ontarians have free access to a core suite of databases through their public libraries until December 2015.
- In addition to the core suite, we identify products to be offered as part of a consortium purchase for public libraries. By aggregating the orders, we maximize discounts and expand the resources available to Ontarians. We also see remarkably low costs for small libraries. For example, one First Nation library acquired a year's subscription to a product for less than $15. In 2014, 137 libraries (44%) spent $2,084,341 (an increase of 2% over 2013) on 78 products. With total expenditure of $3,794,341 for the core suite and consortium purchases together.
- SOLS also offers interlibrary loan across the province. Through INFO (Information Network for Ontario), libraries borrow over 300,000 items from other libraries annually. 83% of Ontario libraries are lenders. 80 of these libraries offer patrons the ability to search, request and manage their own interlibrary loans.
- SOLS coordinates buying pools for specialized materials (e.g., multilingual resources, DVDs, talking books, large print books) providing library users with fresh collections every few months. For participating libraries, these collections represent a significant proportion of that collection type available to their users.
- SOLS manages the Internet Connectivity grant from the Ministry enabling libraries throughout the province to receive high speed connectivity. This fund has greatly enhanced patron access to wi-fi in the library and the community.
- SOLS manages a provincial consortium providing access to ebooks, audiobooks, music, and videos for Ontarians through their public libraries. 193 libraries participate in this collection.

In terms of measuring the impact on Ontarians of these services, our focus is on ensuring the most cost effective and efficient provision of services and/or products for the libraries. We must rely on libraries to demonstrate the value of these resources locally.

4. **Would Canadians know of, or understand, the contribution you make to library/archival service in Canada?**

While we require that public libraries acknowledge the support of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport where provincial funding has been provided, SOLS's contribution is mainly acknowledged through the libraries and their Boards rather than from individual citizens.

5. **What inhibits you from providing services that ultimately would improve library/archive services to Canadians?**

Providing the types of services described above requires funding either at the provincial level or from the libraries directly. Some of these types of projects can only be undertaken when and/or if we have special project funding. Also, increased role clarity and collaboration between the many library service organizations recently in the province has improved our capacity to provide unique services.

6. What do you see as the challenges for libraries and archives in the forthcoming years?

- Keeping up with the rapid pace of technological change that is the world in which libraries operate today
- Focus on making staff more open, responsive, and flexible; this includes leadership from CEOs and managers and library board members who often have a very traditional sense of library services
- Addressing the significant turnover at the CEO/senior staffing level where succession planning has not always been done, resulting in steep learning curves faced by incoming leaders
- Embracing the "book brand" associated with libraries while shifting more focus on access to: collections, space, expertise, creativity, community building and engagement
- Expanding the public and funders' perceptions of the multitude of roles played by the libraries in the digital era
- Increasing competition for municipal funding in an era of tight public money; expectations of lower taxes on the part of the public

FRAMING QUESTIONS:

SERVICES
1. How would you describe the services Canadians, including Aboriginal Canadians and new Canadians, are currently receiving from libraries and archives in Canada?
2. Libraries are currently hybrid operations, constantly pulled toward traditional services by many core users and pulled, equally, by a concern for relevancy from other users and potential users. What issues are libraries facing as they try to make the transition to new service models?
3. How do libraries and archives measure outcomes of their service and community impacts?
4. Are libraries the appropriate institutions to catalog, store, and provide access to research data? If not, which institutions should provide these services?

These are questions more appropriately answered by libraries which will vary considerably by size and location.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND AWARENESS
1. Would Canadians know of, or understand, the contribution you make to library/archival service in Canada? Please see question 4 above.
2. Describe the services provided directly to users within your context, or whether they are consortial in nature; please describe the mechanisms in place to define, refine and measure the impact of the services. Please see question 3 above.
3. In the digital era, what support for patrons do/should libraries provide?

The role of libraries is to guide patrons through the myriad of resources available in this digital world. They should provide access to resources and training in information and data literacy.

1. What in your opinion are the specific roles of libraries and/or archives and/or museums and other heritage institutions in community building and memory building?
- Libraries as public space: help and create and sustain a sense of local identity
- Libraries are highly valued as neutral and safe places.
- Libraries better designed as they accommodate more people at the cost of collection space
- Libraries as cultural players
- Evolution of public library from a standalone institution to more of a community player

NEW DIRECTIONS
Digitization
1. What are the main challenges of born-digital material for your institution?

With space being at a premium, public libraries are licensing and providing more access to e-content. Access to e-content can only be maintained through ongoing maintenance fees to vendors. Stop paying and all access is lost. Universities across the world are creating digital repositories to ensure ongoing availability of content. To the best of our knowledge, public libraries have not really engaged in this discussion at all.

2. What role libraries and archives should take in the digitization, the dissemination and the long-term preservation of Canadian heritage (print publications and archives)?

- Coordinating digitization of collections with organizations like Our Digital World in Ontario, local archives and museums
- Create regional collections…libraries should look not do it alone but in fact to find partners with a shared interest
- Libraries can play a public awareness role in their community and showcase such collections

3. What will be the function and future of a brick-and-mortar library or archive in a paperless future?

For public libraries, the library as place/destination is a trend that has gained considerable momentum. Contrary to predictions, visits to libraries have increased in recent years. Citizens visit public libraries to access technology, browse, read newspapers and magazines, meet in small groups, attend programs, take in arts and culture exhibits and events, and recently, to discover maker space programs and services. There is every indication that public libraries will continue to play an important community gathering space/cultural hub role in both rural and urban communities. Instead of a paperless future, we see a hybrid one evolving with a growing range of media.

Education
1. What changes, in your judgment, are necessary in the professional education and training of librarians/archivists in the 21st century?

Incorporate design thinking and innovative practices into the curriculum so that librarians and archivists are equipped to not only manage change, but lead change strategically and design programs and services that are client-focused.   Also courses on political effectiveness would be helpful.

2. What conversations do you think need to take place with library, archival, and information studies programs about professional competency requirements, and have they begun?

Not aware of the extent to which such conversations may already be happening, but there needs to be an ongoing, expansive conversation about what kind of leadership we need to lead our libraries and archives and part of that is the importance of people skills and relationship building. We need leaders and ambassadors who are skilled at collaborating, influencing, generating enthusiasm, cultivating commitment. As already stated, other competencies that need to be talked about are those that contribute to innovation and design.

The challenge for information studies programs is that the profession is still going to require a small number of librarians and archivists to bring **depth** of professional knowledge to the workplace, but we also need unprecedented **breadth** of knowledge and abilities. Libraries are continually expanding into the work of other professions – e.g. community development, cultural planning, and services to newcomers and, perhaps in the future, services specifically aimed at slowing cognitive decline of an aging population. All of these newer forays co-exist with traditional and cutting-edge library services, requiring library staff to have an unprecedented multitude of skills and abilities and readiness to embark upon new ventures. It is virtually impossible for the professional schools to provide for all of these eventualities, thus the conversation needs to be about identifying the priorities for the professional and library techniques programs and which training requirements will fall to the employers and/or professional associations.

SOLS has recently (December 2013) launched a competencies index for public library staff. Based on WebJunction's Competency Index for the Library Field, the SOLS Competencies Index is organized into five categories: Personal/Interpersonal; Management/Leadership; Public Service; Collection Management; and Technology. While the competencies were developed by SOLS staff, in consultation with staff in client libraries, SOLS would be interested in working with other agencies and organizations to coordinate a comprehensive and cohesive approach to competencies across the library sector.

SOLS is the project lead on an integrated Training and Information Portal for public library staff.   The aim of the portal is to be the 'one place to look' for training and development opportunities for public library staff. Other partners currently at the table are Southern Ontario Library Service North, the Ontario Library Association, the Ontario

Association of Library Technicians, Hamilton Public Library and London Public Library. Part of the vision is that by coordinating promotion of and access to training and development opportunities, the partners will, over time, also collaborate on development and delivery of relevant training and development events. This collaborative venture has the potential to offer the public library community a wide array of rich learning opportunities that will build the skills, abilities and knowledge of the staff who provide library service to the residents of Ontario.

Resources
1. Public libraries are primarily funded by local municipalities, with little funding from any other level of government. Many towns and rural communities are too small to support needed technology. How do we encourage the creation of library systems (or consortia) that can meet the increasingly sophisticated technology-driven needs of libraries—whether urban or rural?

Ontario has a long history of cooperation and collaboration among libraries. Whether initiated by organizations like the OLSs (Southern Ontario Library Service and the Ontario Library Service-North) or groups of libraries coming together because of their geography, size or particular interests, they have long thrived in this province. These joint ventures usually come about because there is either provincial funding made available or there is a perceived cost benefit to those exploring such opportunities.

As a provincial agency tasked with increasing "cooperation and coordination" we have been fortunate to be the conduit for many provincial projects. In 2008, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, & Sport announced a fourth quarter investment of $15 million to help SOLS and OLS-North work collaboratively "to support public libraries to bridge the digital divide and to provide all Ontarians with equitable access to digital information, community collections and services".

One such project was the provincial OverDrive collection. While funded for 2 years through the $15M grant, it is now completely library funded. Where there is demonstrated demand and value, libraries will come together naturally and organizations like SOLS can play a critical role in fostering and implementing such initiatives.

2. Assuming host institutions/governments have financial resource constraints, and assuming libraries and archives are equally constrained, how might libraries and archives attract alternate funding adequate to meet the expectations of their users?

Libraries are a public good and in order to remain neutral, inclusive and universally accessible places they need to remain publicly funded. Libraries need to make a better case for the ROI libraries bring to the community…for example see the recent [Toronto Public Library Martin Prosperity Institute repor](#)t on the economic impact of the library on the city of Toronto.

In fact, it can be argued that libraries should be supported financially by all three levels of government. Because libraries provide universal access to information/ information technology and assistance in making sense of information, as well as make available learning resources and opportunities, they make a significant contribution to Canadians' efforts to learn, adapt to change, and participate in an increasingly digital economy.   They level the playing field and make it possible for every Canadian to thrive in a changing world. Libraries contribute to the work of many government portfolios, including: Health & Long Term Care; Literacy/Education/ Higher Education & Training; Municipal Affairs; Citizenship; Services to New Canadians; Community & Social Services; Arts & Culture; Employment and Workforce Readiness. They are an excellent return on investment and should be funded by those ministries whose work they facilitate.

3. What percentage increase to your current budget would permit you to realize the aspirations of your users? If you received an increased budget and consistent adequate resources, describe your library/archives in 2017.

If this question applies specifically to libraries, then we cannot answer on their behalf as each one will be specific to the community it serves.

Some initiatives we would entertain if we had "all the money in the world" would include:
- More training: the ability to develop more initiatives targeting our libraries at an accelerated pace than we can now because of insufficient funding
- Annual Change Institute focused on change leadership and innovation
- Create a Municipal Partner Award that would go to a library that has gone above and beyond in terms of partnering with the municipality